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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Karen Keninger, 57, Newton, Iowa
Meredith Ferguson
Iowa Department for the Blind, Des Moines, Iowa
1-26-11**

Meredith Ferguson: My name is Meredith Ferguson and I am interviewing Karen Keninger, who is currently the Director for the Iowa Department for the Blind. We are in her office at the Department in Des Moines, Iowa. The date is January

26, 2011. It's just after 2 pm. This interview is being conducted as part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa, Oral History Project. Before we get started I need to read this release out loud so you're aware of how this interview will be used. All stories submitted to this project will become a part of the History of Blindness Collection owned by the state and by the Iowa Department for the Blind. By submitting your story you are acknowledging that your story is a gift, which transfers to the Iowa Department for the Blind all legal title and property rights. You will be granting to the Iowa Department for the Blind an unrestricted license to use this recording and all the information it contains, in any manner the Iowa Department for the Blind wishes to use it, for as long as the Iowa Department for the Blind may wish to use it. Karen, do you agree to have your story recorded?

Karen Keninger: Yes, I do.

Ferguson: Okay, before I ask you any further questions can you give me your age and the city where you currently live?

Keninger: Yes, I am 57-years-old. I live in Newton, Iowa.

Ferguson: Okay. I have a rough list of questions, but along the lines if there's anything that you want to expand upon or anything that you have, by all means just start to say something.

Keninger: Okay.

Ferguson: My first question is, what is the cause of your blindness, and at what age did you become blind?

Keninger: Well, I was born in 1953, and when I was about 16 months old, my baby sitter realized that my eyes looked strange. They were wondering around in odd ways, apparently, and then I walked under a table and whacked my head and they said, "There's something the matter with that child!" (Laughter) So, they took me to a doctor and the doctor actually over prescribed dilation, like, Atropine. He told them they had to dilate my eyes for three days in a row with maximum Atropine, so that by the time I got to the doctor I was very light phobic, and apparently hiding my head under a pillow on the floor of the back seat of the car. It was very traumatic actually. But, the doctor said, "Yeah, there's something the matter with her eyes." Didn't know exactly what. Eventually, stopped going to that doctor and went to another doctor, an Iowa City Dr. Weinfelder, and got prescribed, "Yeah, there's something wrong with her eyes." (Laughter) And, they put glasses on me which I wore with religious fervor apparently right away, because I could actually see quite a bit better. Even at the age of 16 months they really helped. So, I have since had a diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa and my vision has deteriorated from there. I don't think I ever had normal vision. I used to be able to read large print when I was little and then as I got older, my vision deteriorated to the point where in my early 20's I realized that I really couldn't see anything.

Ferguson: Did you have any siblings growing up, or were you an only child?

Keninger: I have six siblings, two brothers and four sisters.

Ferguson: Wow, big family!

Keninger: Yeah, and I was number three of that bunch. Number six child, my sister also has the same eye disease as I do. There was no family history of this. It was all a bit of a mystery to everybody, but my sister and I both have it.

Ferguson: Okay, and is your sister...did she go through the same thing like is she completely blind now, too?

Keninger: Yeah, she is.

Ferguson: Okay.

Keninger: Pretty much the same story except that she didn't start out with the Atropine doctor. (Laughter)

Ferguson: A bit better start. (Laughter)

Keninger: A little better, yeah. (Laughter)

Ferguson: So, one other sister was born blind. Did you feel that you were treated any differently by your family, like either by your parents or your siblings, or anybody else, because you were blind?

Keninger: I suppose in some ways I was, but I was also very fortunate because my mother was adamant that I grow up and learn to take care of myself. She had a heart attack when I was about three and she was afraid that she wouldn't

be around long enough to raise me, and so she was determined that I not, you know, get any special privileges. And so, I had all the same chores and all the same responsibilities as my brothers and sisters. And, my younger sister might tell you that she was instructed to look after me; I don't know if that's true or not. (Laughter) It didn't seem like that at the time. But, we were real close, my sister and I, my next younger sister and I growing up, but then I went to school at the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School when I was five and, of course, my other brothers and sisters went to public school. So, there were some definite differences there.

Ferguson: Did your younger sister go to the Iowa Braille school, too?

Keninger: Yes, she did. She did although she went as a day student and I went as a full-time, residential student.

Ferguson: Did you...so you lived very near the school yet?

Keninger: Yeah, my parents farmed and the farm was only about five miles away from the school, so I was already in place having been born in Vinton.

Ferguson: But, you lived at the school, or did you...because you said your sister was a day student?

Keninger: Yeah, Dad would take me to school on Monday mornings just before classes started and then I would stay till Friday after school and they'd come and get me. So, I was home every weekend, and then I also went home

usually on like Wednesday night, at least one night in the middle of the week my Dad would come pick me up. So, I would stay three nights a week at the school in the dorm.

Ferguson: Okay. Roughly how many students would you say were there when you attended?

Keninger: There would be in between 160, I think about that many when I graduated, or shortly before I graduated anyway; 200 perhaps when I was smaller, when I was younger.

Ferguson: How many did you graduate with?

Keninger: There were twelve in my graduating class.

Ferguson: Okay.

Keninger: We had a bigger class than that when I was a Freshman, but by the time we graduated four or five of those people had gone on to public school to finish out their last one or two years.

Ferguson: But, you didn't go to public school?

Keninger: I didn't. No, I took some classes at the public school. That was the first year that they did any of that. I'd went down to the public school for Physics and Government classes, but the rest of the classes I had at the school.

Ferguson: What year was that?

Keninger: 1969-70 was my senior year.

Ferguson: And, you said that was the first year that they did that?

Keninger: Yeah, that was the first year that we had any classes at the public school.

Ferguson: Did you like doing that or were you kind of ambivalent at the time?

Keninger: Well, I thought I would really like it but it was kind of...I didn't know anybody there. And so, I was the only one that went down there for Physics and it was hard partly because a lot of the materials I had to use a magnifying glass to look at, even the blown up pictures of the diagrams and stuff, and I really kind of struggled with that and the fact that I didn't know anybody in the class and high school students aren't always the most welcoming people on the face of the planet. (Laughter) So, it was kind of lonesome but I managed. It was a good thing to do, but it was a little bit awkward. Government wasn't quite so bad, because some of my other classmates were there with me so that was a little bit easier.

Ferguson: Could you maybe describe a regular day, I guess, at the Braille School, like the kinds of classes that you took?

Keninger: Oh, sure.

Ferguson: Or the types of skills that they taught you?

Keninger: You lived in a dormitory, and I obviously lived in the girls' dorm. We would have had probably when I first started in kindergarten, there were two rooms that had like six girls in each or so, and this was kindergarteners and first grade. And then, there was one room that had me in it. I never understood why I had the room all to myself.

(Laughter) And, my house mother kept saying to me, "You want a roommate?" And, I thought she kept saying a room made and I thought, I already had a room so why do I need a room made; I didn't understand what she was talking about.

(Laughter) But, eventually they did put a girl in with me, JoAnn Giudicessi, who became my very, very best friend and then we hung out together all through kindergarten and first grade. And, we had a house mother who was there pretty much all the time that we were not in class. She worked 24-7 pretty much, except she'd get two days off a week, which two days we'd have a substitute house mother. And then, as I got older there were three other dorms that we'd go through, the one that was like second, third, fourth grade and then one that was fifth, sixth, seventh and then one that was high school. And, each dorm had a house mother for the girls and the boys had house fathers, and substitute house mothers they had both.

And, you'd get up when the bell rang at 6:30 and you had about 20 minutes to get dressed and ready to go to breakfast. And then, the bell...we lived by bells; the bell would ring, it was ten minutes till seven; that meant get in the lounge and get ready to line up. And then, that would be at five minutes 'till seven and then you'd line up and you'd walk in a line two by two over to the dining room either through the tunnel or through the outside way, depending on the weather. And then, you would stand in line at the portal

to the dining room until another gong rang, and then you'd all file into the dining room. (Laughter) And, you'd find your places. You had assigned seats at the tables. And, each table had a server which was usually an older kid who would pass the plates around and pass the food; it got served family style, and we had waitresses but we got served family style, and we'd pass the food around and take what we wanted or whatever.

Ferguson: So, you served yourselves.

Keninger: Yeah, when we got a little bit older the server did that; the high school kid that sat at the table often did the serving for the little kids, and then as we got older we served ourselves. So, we'd have breakfast and then there would be a gong (Laughter) that would have us stand up and...no we'd have to stand first, that's how that went, and we'd stand and they'd ring the gong and then...and when I was little they would sing a blessing like, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," or something like that and then we would all sit down at the same time; there would be this loud scraping of chairs and we would eat. And, there'd be another gong that would say that the high school kids could leave, and then if you were a little kid you'd have to wait for the next gong which the basic dining room matron managed and then you could leave the dining room and go back to the dormitory.

And, in the mornings the job was to then get ready to go to school and school started at 8 'o'clock. And we would go to our classrooms, which once we got out of kindergarten, were in the main building. And, we would have...what classes did we have when I was little? I suppose it was just

your standard elementary school classes, Reading and stuff. We had Gym, or we would go over to the gymnasium and we learned to swim, I think, when I was in first grade because swimming was part of our Gym curriculum, and we had a swimming pool and I think we went swimming two days a week. We had Gym every day and we had other games and exercise, lots of calisthenics. We would run the track. Usually running meant a partial kid who could see something would take a kid who couldn't and kind of be the guide. It was a very hazardous system because they thought I could see, (Laughter) and I really couldn't, but we were good fakers. (Laughter)

In the classroom when I was in first grade, kindergarten and first grade I was large print, and they thought I could see what I was doing, except they thought I was retarded because I kept getting everything wrong. (Laughter) And, they thought I could see because I could see and I faked it well enough to play...to run around on the playground and drag the blind kids around and that sort of thing. So, my mother finally intervened, I think, and said, "She really cannot see, hello! This is a school for the blind; teach this child Braille." (Laughter) So, in second grade then I was taken out of second grade class, Reading class, every day for about three months to learn Braille. I went down the hall to Mrs. Petrucci's classroom and I learned Braille with her one-on-one. She maybe had two or three students in there at a time. And so, I learned Braille that Fall of second grade and was pretty good at it and got...at first it was hard, but it got easy fairly quickly apparently because by Christmas I was reading pretty fluently. And by February, somebody decided that I was smart enough and my Braille was good

enough to skip the rest of second grade and just move on into third grade.

Ferguson: Oh, wow!

Keninger: Which made all my second grade friends hate me, and all my third grade people didn't like me either.

(Laughter) It was a little awkward at first, and there were things that I didn't know that nobody thought to tell me, like I was trying to do third grade math and having never finished second grade math. And so, I didn't know what a cent sign was and some of these other little details, which I eventually figured out, but I remember it as being kind of stressful at first. (Laughter) So, we had Math and Social Studies and Reading and Science and all those regular standard classes.

15:00

Keninger: So, anyway we'd go to class in the morning and then we'd be done at class at about noon and we'd go back to the dorm and then we would do this whole same bell, line up, bell, walk, bell, go in, gong, sit down, gong, you can leave, gong, the little kids can leave, kind of routine for each meal. And, the dining room was a big, open space with kind of a wide aisle down the middle and all the girls were on one side and all of the boys were on the other side, and never the twain were permitted to meet until my Senior year, I think it was, one of our big excitements was that we got mixed seating. So, the girls and the boys could sit at the same table. But, it was...it worked and it was what we knew, so you just do what you know. And, we'd go back to

the dorm for oh, probably half an hour, 40 minutes, and then classes would start again at about 1:20, or something like that. That lunch hour was always kind of interesting because my house mother, especially when I was in Junior High, upper elementary liked the soaps. She liked to watch, "As the World Turns," and it happened to be on at 12:30 or something, I think it was 12:30. So, in order not to have to watch us she made us come in and sit down and watch the soaps. (Laughter) So, I have never had any appreciation for the soaps as a result because it was always something we were forced to do; that and Red Skelton, she always watched that at night. (Laughter) It also meant, though, that I was sitting on the floor right in front of the television set when they announced Kennedy's assassination. So, that's my memory of that because Mrs. Harmon made us watch, "As the World Turns." Then we'd go to class again from 1:20 to 4 'oclock. And, we'd have...our class periods were probably about 50 minutes with maybe I don't know five minutes passing time or something I'm not sure I can't remember. And then, we would...at 4 'o'clock we would be done with classes and we would have until 5:30...if we were little kids we would have that time to play outside if it was decent inside if it wasn't, I guess. What did we play? When we were little we'd play in the leaves. We played little kid games I don't know.

Ferguson: Was there...I remember reading about some type of seesaw contraption?

Keninger: Oh yeah, teeter-totters. We had teeter-totters and marry-go-rounds and a jungle gym kind of climbing thing by the little kids' cottage and also behind the girls' dorm,

and swings. So, we had that and these great, big elm trees these big American elms, which were great big beautiful trees, which Dutch elm disease came and got during my time. So, they had to cut them down. So, we'd play on that equipment or we'd play in the leaves from those trees in the fall. It was really quite a lovely campus. We had quite a bit of space to play. In the winter we had a...there was like a three-hill terrace in one area, behind what we called the hospital, where we would sled.

Ferguson: Oh, nice.

Keninger: And, it was fun. And then, at 5:30 we did the whole line up...did the bell routine again; marched over to our supper. And, they fed us well. We had, I think, very good quality food compared, especially to some of the other schools for the blind that I visited when I was in high school on the cheer leading squad, and we would visit different places. Their food was pretty...ours was better. (Laughter)

Ferguson: That's a nice way of putting it. (Laughter)

Keninger: And then, we'd have study hour after supper. We would get back to the dorm and from 6:15 to 7:15, I think it was, was study hour and everybody was required to sit down at a table in the study room; each dorm had a study room, or if you were on the honor roll you were allowed to study in your bedroom. Hurray! (Laughter) And, you were expected to do your homework. The house mothers, I don't recall them being particularly helpful with homework. They were mostly like hall monitors, "Get back in there, sit down and shut up." (Laughter) You weren't allowed to talk and you

were supposed to be doing your homework. And, we had homework like anybody else had at that time. I don't think...I think kids have a lot more homework now than we used to have and that my siblings used to have, too. And then, from 7:30 or 7:15 until our bed time we, which depended on how old we were, between...I suppose they must have put us to bed at eight or 9:30 was when you were a big girl; you got to stay up till 9:30. There was a bell that rang at 9:30; lights out ladies. (Laughter) Yeah, that was kind of the routine.

When I got into high school I got on the cheerleading squad, so the cheerleading would be done...our practice was every day after school from 4 to 5:15, or something, so we'd just barely have time to get showered and back to our dorms for supper. And, we had wrestling team who would also practice at the same time and a track team in the fall. We were usually pretty bad at track when I was in high school. It was always boys track, and I remember one time going to this big tournament in Ohio and coming back with the last place trophy; we were not good. (Laughter) But, we had some really good wrestling teams when I was in high school and won some schools for the blind tournament stuff, and we had some wrestlers who actually went to state, regular state wrestling tournament.

Ferguson: Awesome! Okay.

Keninger: I got to be the queen of the tournament when I was a senior. I was elected that; it was very cool. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Nice!

Keninger: It was nice; it was very cool.

Ferguson: You mentioned that boys and girls were separated, like, mostly throughout the day, especially in the dining hall. I guess having heard some of the other interviews and they talked about the gender dynamics, did you get the feeling that, I don't know, boys and girls were treated any differently, or was it just a separation thing?

Keninger: Oh, there was definitely the separation thing. I believe that it used to be way more strict than it was by the time I was there, and by the time I cared, which was Junior High or something, we were very separated in the dining room; we were not separated at all in the classroom. They used to be, I think, back in the dark ages they were separated in the classroom, but we weren't. We were separated, you know, after school the girls had kind of one half of the campus, let's see, north half and the boys had pretty much the south, half in terms of playgrounds and stuff.

Ferguson: Because those were where the dorms were?

Keninger: That's where the dorms were, yeah. So, you wouldn't dare go over to the boys' dorm. I mean you wouldn't dare; unless, of course, you were a high school girl with a boyfriend who you might want to see. There might have been a little bit of that here and there, yes indeed! (Laughter) There are ways around most rules.

Ferguson: Of course! And, you mentioned there were tunnels that ran all around?

Keninger: Mostly around. They went from the girls' dorm to the main building, and then they went to the boys' dorm and the cottage, which was where the little, tiny kids were. The gym wasn't connected by a tunnel, but those main dorms and stuff were, so we wouldn't necessarily have to be outside in the weather.

Ferguson: Oh, that was nice.

Keninger: Yeah, it was handy.

Ferguson: Did you...just having listened to how you described a particular day, did you feel it was very regimented at all?

Keninger: I didn't know any different; it just was. Looking back on it, yes it was very regimented, but it just was the way we did. It didn't, you know, we didn't have any negative feelings about it; it just was the routine we had.

Ferguson: Sure, okay.

Keninger: I know I had a good mix of home and school. I know a lot of people who didn't, but I did. I had my parents were right, very close by and very involved. My mother taught at the school for a few years, and they were always there for the PTA's and all the concerts and all the plays that we were in, and they went to some of the wrestling meets and the cheerleading stuff. They were very involved

and right there so I had that plus, like I said, going home at least one night a week, which while I was in high school, I didn't appreciate very much. (Laughter) But, all of that gave me, I think, the best of both and I didn't have any negative feelings about the school; it just was where I was.

Ferguson: Sure, okay. Did you feel isolated at all being...I don't know if that's the correct word but it just seems that the Braille School, in general, it seemed like its own little entity?

Keninger: It was very much its own little world. We had virtually no contact with the kids in the public school, or with even any neighborhood kids or anything. We were very much a little world on our own. So, in that respect I guess yes. I did go to catechism classes with my sisters, and so there would be the other Catholic kids, you know, from the church in those things. They were like every Saturday morning from eight to noon or something. They seemed like they were very, very long. (Laughter) And so, I had contact with the sighted kids in that context, but I didn't interact all that much with them. I was mostly with my sis...I had a sister who was in the same grade as I was, so we were...because I got promoted and she was just a year older than me, so we were in the same grade and we kind of hung together for that, but I didn't get really...I never really could say I found any friends in that environment.

Ferguson: Okay. You also talked about partials and then fully blind students. Did you, I guess like you said you wouldn't have noticed at the time, maybe, but looking back

were they treated differently like attitude wise from the other teachers or...

Keninger: Oh, yeah. And, I think I did even notice that at the time because I played up my partial status as much as I could, because I got to do things that some of the totals didn't, like, I would get to give a tour. And, I don't think any of the totals got to give tours. I don't know why, but they didn't. We had a lot of tour visiting people, and so we'd get out of class to do that. And, that was fun until they realized...well it got to be less fun but...and there were other privileges that some of the...like if you wanted to go...if I wanted to go off campus, I had to go with somebody who could see, who was considered a partial. We didn't have canes when I was little, in fact we didn't get them until probably my freshman year in high school, maybe. Nobody had them; they were a thing that nobody had, and so we really didn't have good travel skills off campus; and we knew the campus like the back of our hands because it was where we lived and, you know, you'd learn it in your feet, but off campus we didn't have any really travel training until I was a little bit older. So, you have to go off campus with somebody else who could see. I don't think the boys got to go by themselves, although I don't know, but we sure didn't; and, in fact, we had to go in pairs anyway. They wouldn't let the girls out one at a time partly because they, well I don't know why. I suppose they didn't want us hanging out with the boys. So, what we'd do when we were in high school was that a couple of us, me and this friend of mine, would go with her boyfriend and my boyfriend and then we'd go...they would allow us to do that, and then we'd go off campus.

We'd go to this place called Hamburger Inn and get a sundae or something after school.

Ferguson: Nice, a little double date.

Keninger: Yeah, a little double date; but we had to be back for supper and we weren't allowed to, like I couldn't go with my boyfriend without going with her and her boyfriend, you know, there was...they wouldn't let us do that, but it was a flawed system in many ways, and one of them is illustrated by the following. I was given the job of taking my friend, Debby, who was a totally blind person, over to the main building from the gym so she could catch her ride home. It was in the middle of the day. My eyes are such that adjusting from the bright sunlight into a darker like an interior is like takes forever by then, so I couldn't see a thing when I'd go into a building. So, the main building had two entrances on the back where I was coming in. The one that I always used was on the north side of the building and it had a door in this hallway and then to the right of the door, to the south of the door, there was an open set of stairs. So, when you'd come in the door you'd swing to the left and you'd miss the stairs, and you'd go on about your business. But, the one on the south it was a mirror image, so when you'd come in that door, if you swing to your left you'd hit the stairs and swing to the right and you'd hit the hall. Well, we came in the south side, which is not where I was used to going in and did the automatic swing to the left and tumbled down this flight of stairs. (Laughter) Me first and Debby right on top of me, and we ended up at the bottom of the stairs in a heap. (Laughter) And, there's this blind teacher who worked in the basement, he taught like chair caning and

stuff, and he came storming down the hall yelling at us to be quiet.

30:00

Keninger: And, we were down there on the floor trying to pick ourselves up. (Laughter) Debby was just a little slip of a thing and I was a bit of a chunk, so the way I figured it was good that I went first, because she landed on top of me instead of the other way around. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Obviously you were okay?

Keninger: Yeah, but if that happened to me today I don't think I would have survived it. But, we had these open stairs that were made out of iron, and they're all gone now because, you know, fire hazard and everything. But, yeah, it wasn't always a good idea to trust me as a sighted guide; it was a really bad idea sometimes. (Laughter)

Ferguson: So, did you...it was second grade was it that they figured out that you were completely blind, or it was second grade when you started to learn Braille, but did they figure out that you were completely blind then?

Keninger: I wasn't completely blind. I still had enough vision to pretend that I could see to walk around and stuff. I never could see well enough to recognize people's faces or anything like that, but I could fake a lot. So, I still had some vision through most of high school, some I suppose you might call it useable vision, at least fake-able vision.

Ferguson: So, you kept that up through high school?

Keninger: Yeah, you just do.

Ferguson: Sure, if you're used to doing it, okay. I guess, can you maybe think of any particular challenges you faced either at the Braille school, or like transitioning into the public school for those two classes? I guess skills wise, or maybe just, like, interacting with people, or with the community in general, I guess?

Keninger: I think that the biggest challenge for me there came when I went to college. I graduated from high school and I went to Seeing Eye and I got my first Seeing Eye dog that summer, and then I went on to college. And, that first year in college I had a lot of difficulty kind of figuring out who I was and how I fit in. And, I was kind of, like, really defensive. (Laughter) It's like if they talked to me, they're just patronizing me. If they don't talk to me, they hate me. (Laughter) It was tough. You know my grades were really good. I got like a 3.8 GPA that year because all I did was study, but I wasn't socially particularly adept with the other kids and it was...it took me a while to come into my own and to realize that well, hell I'm still me and I'm just as good as they are; and that was a tough year for me. And, it was the...I don't know, just was getting settled in and I think it is kind of a tough year for a lot of people.

Ferguson: Yeah, I mean I remember freshman year of college, in general, we were all just kind of floundering at first because you're just thrown into a new environment and you got to figure out how you fit in.

Keninger: A-hum. I was also having trouble with my instructors, at that time, and that didn't make me feel any better. My Biology instructor, I think he was the Department Chair, and he had Freshman Biology and he was an arrogant person. And, I went up to him right at the beginning of the year and said to him, "Dr. Schlesinger, I need to take my tests in a different way; I want to talk to you about that." "Well, you can't take my tests." "Why?" "Well, because there's no way you could pass my tests." "How come?" "You couldn't possibly; it just can't happen." "Well, can I like try?" "Well, I suppose, but if you want to fail that's your problem." That was pretty much the conversation. So, he set me up in the Dean's office and they got somebody to read to me because they not only were sure I was going to fail the test, but they wanted to make very sure that there wasn't any cheating going on. So, they had it done in the Dean's office where there wouldn't be any cheating or anything, and I don't know who it was that read me the test, but I told them, "I just need you to read me the test and mark the answers I tell you to." It was multiple choice and it was tricky. It was... you had to know your stuff pretty well, but I actually did know my stuff pretty well. And, I came out of there with an A on the first test, and then I went back to him and I said, "I want to talk to you about this; do you have any problems with the way that this turned out?" And, he just would hardly talk to me; it was rude.

And then, there was a Biology lab and I planned on taking the lab until the lab instructor said, "You can't take my lab." And I said, "Why can't I take your lab?" "Oh no, no, no, you can't possibly; you can't possibly." And so, I ended up in the Dean's office to try to plead my case, and you have

to remember I'm 17-years-old. I've no experience at any of this stuff, and so I'm sitting there trying to explain to the Dean that I have ways of dealing with this stuff. I know people who have done it. I have a support system; I can do this and he was going nowhere with it; he just was you know, "You can't; you can't. We won't stake our reputation on that because if we pass you through then they'll know that we have no...we're no good." I mean that was kind of the upshot of it, and I was feeling pretty bad, and then finally I had a boxer as a Seeing Eye dog; she threw up. (Laughter) She...yeah, right there in the Dean's office, she threw up all over the floor and the Dean was pretty disgusted with the whole thing, and just gave up. And so, I took that as okay, I'm taking the lab. So, I took the lab and I got an A in the lab and they stopped yelling about that. But then, I decided I really liked Biology. And so, I thought I would have a Biology major, but again, I ran up against the same Dr. Schlesinger, plus his whole bunch of people, his whole department; and I had to go to them, and here again I'm 17, and I'm trying to make my case for I can do this, but I don't have all the answers and I'm, you know, just a young girl and I'm not all that sturdy either. So, I go in there and they're asking me, "Well what in the world would you do with it anyway?" And, how would you do this and how would you do that? It came down to this, "We could not...our reputation would be tarnished if we allowed you a degree in our department. We are Behavioral Biology Department and you couldn't possibly do anything that would merit us giving you a degree, and so we can't admit you." Well, that was pretty devastating. And, that's one thing I'd really like to do again is go back there and have a conversation with those people. But, I gave up at that point and actually transferred.

By then I also was engaged, and so I transferred to Drake and enrolled in Journalism and had a much better experience there. But, so yeah, there were some tough things that I ran into. It wasn't that I couldn't do the academic...I really felt like I was well prepared for the classes that I took at...that was Creighton that I went to first and I got a 3.8 GPA. I did not struggle or flounder on the academic level at all, and I think it was the background that I had from the classes that I had at Vinton; either that or I don't know what else, because that's the only school I had.

Ferguson: You were well prepared for wanting to work for it and being able to do the work; it wasn't...the academics themselves wasn't the challenge; it was more the social interaction?

Keninger: It was the social interaction, yeah, and the teachers.

Ferguson: Yeah, yeah and the attitudes that you faced.

Keninger: And, at that time, I was also at Vinton at the time that Kenneth Jernigan was making an effort to take control of the school, and so I was a student at the school and was kind of caught up in this whole thing in terms of the politics of it. And, so part of the impact that that had on me at the time was that I did not trust the people down here at the Commission and I didn't come here at all. And, I made as little effort to have anything to do with them as possible, which meant that I didn't have any assistance from either when it came to some of these things, because I never

asked for it. I think if I had asked they'd have come and supported me, but I didn't ask. They paid for my college and they supported me in any way, you know, in all that way but I didn't ask for that, come and help me talk to these Biology people or anything like that.

Ferguson: Looking back do you wish you'd done that, asked for help or...

Keninger: Oh, yes. I would certainly encourage a student to ask for help now, so I...yeah I should have. It would have been better if I had because it was really traumatic just, you know, really difficult because these guys were...they struck me as very pompous and arrogant. (Laughter) And, maybe they weren't; maybe they were really nice people, but that's how it felt. So, I transferred from Creighton to Drake when I was half way, well, the middle of my sophomore year and got my...my experience at Drake was different because I was different by then; I was stronger and I knew more about what I was doing. And, I was also engaged and got married that next spring, so my focus was elsewhere. And so, I just lived one semester in the dorm at Drake and then I got married and finished Drake while I was living in Des Moines.

Ferguson: So, you went to Drake for Journalism?

Keninger: Yeah.

Ferguson: And did you go through senior year? Did you finish that?

Keninger: I did, I finished it in December of '73. Got my degree, Bachelor's, in Journalism then. My daughter was born in February of '73, so it was a busy time. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Yeah.

Keninger: And then, I went to work, but not in Journalism. I went to work as a transcription typist actually. Ed Sheppard here at the Commission got me a job as a transcription-typist at Employment Security Commission, and I typed transcripts of unemployment hearings. Worked second shift so that my husband and I could alternate care of the kids, because I had one and then I had another while I was still working. They [my employers] were not too happy about that, but such is life. (Laughter) And then, I quit working after I'd been there for a couple of years. Then I stayed home and basically raised kids for the next 12, 15 years.

Ferguson: Okay. So, did you attend the Orientation Center here at all?

Keninger: No, I never did. When I was in high school I was encouraged to come down here but my parents who were also very much involved, particularly my mother, in this whole Jernigan versus the Braille school mess, they would have none of it. So, it really wasn't a choice of mine. I was very much under the influence of my mother. (Laughter) And so, I never did come down here at all. I knew I needed to do something and what I ended up doing was going to the Seeing Eye in New Jersey and getting a dog guide instead.

Ferguson: Okay, so how did you...you said Ed Sheppard here was the one that helped you get the job?

Keninger: Yeah.

Ferguson: So, when did you...I guess when did you first come into or when did you contact the Commission?

Keninger: I don't remember. I'm sure I was in contact with them at various levels throughout college. I know that I came here for college days in my freshman year because Dave Quick picked me up in Omaha and brought me here, and I think that was the first time I met Kenneth Jernigan and Florence Grannis. I was pretty callow, pretty young, pretty intimidated. (Laughter)

Ferguson: From what I hear, they were pretty strong personalities.

Keninger: They were and I just really wanted to be not noticed and to get out of here. In fact, one thing that happened...the Commission had had a reputation at that time of being very much against dog guides. At least, that's what I understood. And so, I came for college days with my dog and I was sharing a room in the dormitory on fifth floor I guess and my dog...I got up in the morning and I went to the bathroom, left the dog in my room while I went to the bathroom and I came back and the dog had hopped up on the bed and peed on it. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Oh, no! (Laughter)

Keninger: I was so mortified. I thought, oh man this is so horrible. Well, this very lovely friend of mine who was also there for college days as a high school friend, Roger, he said to tell you what he said, "I'll swap bedding with you so they think I peed the bed!" (Laughter)

Ferguson: What a great guy!

Keninger: What a guy! I love him to this day for that one. (Laughter)

Ferguson: So, you had a Seeing Eye dog first. So, when did you learn cane travel, because I see you use a cane now so when did you, or I guess, when did you start learning that skill?

Keninger: Well, when I was in high school we had some cane travel lessons, not a lot, but some.

45:00

Keninger: With these little short canes; I think they came up to about here [my chest] on me. And, I guess, I learned the basic techniques from that and then I've used a cane off and on over the years and just picked up the skill from practice.

Ferguson: Okay. Would you say you used a dog more or cane more, or is it kind of pretty even?

Keninger: It used to be that I would tell you I used a dog almost exclusively, but now it depends on where I am. Outside is the dog; inside is like it's in this building or

something it's the cane. There's some things you can do more easily with the cane than you can with a dog and some things you can do more easily with a dog if you're competent with both, so I kind of trade off.

Ferguson: So, do you advocate for both?

Keninger: What I suggest, what I say, is the dog is fantastic if you're willing to commit to the work that it takes and you've got really good orientation skills because you've got to keep track of where you are and it's harder to do with the dog. And, you've got to have good, solid cane skills first, which I didn't have, but I know the value of it. And, the dog guide schools now aren't accepting students who don't have good, solid orientation and mobility skills because they know that the work with the dog can be pretty ineffective if you don't. Because, a dog can go off at an angle and you won't notice it. The dog will go past a thing that you might have used for a landmark and you will have no idea that it's there. I know, I mean I was walking up this block one day with my cane because the dog was sick or something and I thought, "All these parking meters!" Because, I don't encounter them with the dog at all, you know. (Laughter)

Ferguson: So, you were a stay-at-home Mom for twelve years, or so. When did you get back into the work force, so to speak, and what did you do?

Keninger: Well, while I was a stay-at-home Mom I picked up some part-time work that I could do at home. I did some typing for an adoption investigator and I did some telephone work for a guy that sold paper. (Laughter) Computer paper

with big, you know, it had green lines on it to people who needed it for accounting; it was back in the day. Anyway, so we did that all by phone. And so, I did that work and then in about '86, I guess, I wanted to learn to use a computer, and so I came back on the case load here. And, I had Brenda as my Counselor and we talked about what it would take and I got a computer, and I went to a convention to find out what I could learn about it. And, this was when it was all very new for blind people to use computers. This was all pretty new for anybody to use computers. So, I got a computer and I figured out how to run it by hook and by crook and by crash. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Trial and error.

Keninger: Abort, retry, fail was my, you know, I saw that all the time. But, I eventually got pretty good at it and I started writing and then I started a home-based business called Wordsworth, which was a resume writing service to start with. My husband had been out of work for a year and I got in the habit of writing and sending out his resumes everywhere. So, I kind of transferred that skill to doing resumes for other people and then I kind of broadened that to be doing brochures and some other reports and that sort of thing; and made some extra money at that. And then, I decided I would go back to school for a Master's degree in order to update my skills, because it was time to get back into the work force. So, I looked at Iowa, at Iowa State. What I really wanted to do was try to get into Iowa's MFA program, but I also realized that what I needed to do was something I could get a real job with. (Laughter) So, Iowa State had a program In Business and Technical writing at a

Master's level, so I decided I would do that. So, I commuted from Newton to Iowa State using every method known to man, I swear, car pools of all shapes and sizes. But anyway, I got a Master's degree from Iowa State. Took me about a year, I can't remember a year and a half, two years something like that, in Business and Technical Writing. And, about that time my business had kind of expanded because I'm now looking at, well, now geez, I can write proposals and grants and that kind of thing because now I had some training in it, and I'm pretty good at it.

So, I started doing that and I came down here and I was on the Library Consumer Advisory Committee and I said why don't we do a grant to see if we can't get some money to do something or other, I think a computer lab or something. And, the Director at the time said, "Well sure." And so, I wrote the grant and although we didn't get that grant, they asked me if I wanted to work on some other grants. Becky was working on a grant and it seemed like there was something else, a couple things. Oh, and they also asked me to write the handbook for the...the student handbook for V.R. And so, I did those things. And then, they started asking me to...I was still running my business at home but they were also still asking me to do computer training for staff, and so I contracted to do computer training. And then, the position that Shan has now, which is Consultant, Rehab Consultant, came open and I was kind of recruited to apply for it, and did, and got it. And so, I started working here in '95. And, I'd been doing a bunch of stuff with my home business and I had to give that up, of course. I was doing work for a news letter organization, writing banking newsletter articles and stuff that I didn't know a whole lot about, but I was learning. "What is float?" I had to ask this

banker. He tried to explain it to me. (Laughter) So, that's how I got back into the work force and I started there and...

Ferguson: And, that's how you got involved here at the Department.

Keninger: Yeah.

Ferguson: Nice gradual thing.

Keninger: Yeah.

Ferguson: How did you come...I guess how did you work up to being Director? Were there other positions that you held?

Keninger: I had the position as a Rehab. Consultant for five years and that was in V.R. so I learned the laws and the regulations, and all that that goes with it. Plus, I was Social Security Consultant, and all that. And then, in 2000 I applied for and got a job as Program Evaluator or something; it had a great, long title I don't remember. But, it was here in the front office and the job was basically a lot of paper work; had to deal with ADA and personnel, and Bruce does a lot of that work now.

Ferguson: Okay.

Keninger: Anyway, got that job and then about six months later the Library Director left and the Director at that time, Creig, said to me, "I need you to go up to the library and be interim supervisor, because we need somebody up there." So, off I went; (Laughter) and I liked it! So, when the

position came open as a permanent position, which was in December, I think, because I went up in September, and then in December I was appointed permanently to that position. So, I was in the Library as Director for eight years until 2008, and then Allen Harris was here for seven of those years, and he was leaving in 2008 and the position was open and I was encouraged by a lot of people to apply for it. And, I thought, you know, I really like what I'm doing. I know how to do it and it's comfortable, (Laughter) but okay. So, I applied for this position and interviewed and the Commission appointed me in 2008.

Ferguson: Okay.

Keninger: So, that's my path; kind of wandering around here and there. (Laughter)

Ferguson: It obviously worked.

Keninger: Well, yeah. (Laughter)

Ferguson: So, you mentioned about learning computers. I guess I'm just interested in maybe...how the changes that you've seen in technology? Like I just know about JAWS in particular? And, I've never even heard of that until I started my internship here. So, I guess, is there any big changes that you can think of, that you remember adjusting to or having to learn, or any good stories, I guess?

Keninger: Aside from abort, retry, ignore! (Laughter) My first computer was a DOS 286...no was it even a 286? I'm sure anyway it was...it had like 20 Megs; no, not even Megs. I

don't know, it had like very little storage space and it was an old thing. It had a screen reading program on it. It was DOS based, and it had a screen reading program on it called Artic. And, I had Word Perfect and Artic, and since what I wanted to do was write, that seemed to work out pretty well because I got very efficient at it and very fast at doing it. It was all done by key strokes that you had to remember how to do everything. There was no mouse. I know what a concept! (Laughter)

Ferguson: So, was Artic like the beginnings of what JAWS is now?

Keninger: Well, it was a different company but it served the same function that JAWS does now. But, it served it in a very different environment. It was the DOS environment which was command line driven, and if you can remember the commands you could do what you wanted and needed to do, it was really very accessible; at least at the level that I used it because it was just because of the nature of the way that it was designed. And then, Windows came in Windows 3.0, or whatever it was, and that was a huge stumbling block, not for me so much because I was still using DOS and doing what I was doing. But, we had a lot of people out in the work force who were starting to have to use Windows because the work places were going to Windows, and they had to either use them or lose it basically. And so, one of the things that I was assigned to do was to figure out how to use the new Windows program with a screen reader which we chose JAWS and we worked on that, trying to figure out how to do it because people were losing their jobs over it. So we worked on that and Windows got...it kept advancing

and JAWS kept lagging behind because Windows wouldn't, or Micro Soft wouldn't, let anybody see how they did what they did, and so JAWS had to sort of figure it out on their own after it came out.

So, in '90...let's see I started here in '95 and in '97 [It was actually '96] I wrote a grant to try to get some people to help work on this project, and to actually to try to figure out how to use a computer with JAWS. There wasn't any training material out there. And, what JAWS had to offer was fairly minimal. And, they also...there were a lot of functions that you could figure out how to do, but you couldn't...it just didn't happen out of the box. So, I got this grant to write training material for JAWS, well for screen readers; we had several we worked with, and Windows programs. And, hired four people to work on the project because I think I got maybe 150 or 200,000 dollars, I can't remember; it seemed like a huge amount of money. I remember when they told me I got the grant I about flew down the stairs. It was like wee!! I was so excited! Hired Mike Barber, Shan Sasser, Laurie Merryman, and Lisa Gard. And, they worked on figuring out ways to do what a person needed to do just to survive in the work force using JAWS and standard Windows programs, Word and Excel and Access and stuff. And, I more or less supervised that project. And so, that's kind of my role. My role was in the changes. I did a lot to publicize the work that we'd done, and we got national recognition for having done some really seminal work in that field and a lot of the training material that's been developed since, used that as a basis; it was their, you know, where to go for the really detailed information and then they would...in a lot of cases they would adapt the material to suit more of a training

environment. So, and I've come along, you know, switched from Artic long ago; I don't remember anything about it. I mean I'd have to learn it all over if I had to learn it and, you know, to JAWS. We chose JAWS because, at the time, we were making a choice it was the most robust program available. So, that's kind of my experience, except that I always wanted to write. And so, one of the things that I managed to do, having finally gotten a computer I learned to do it, and this was early on, but was to actually do some serious writing because it would be so much easier using a computer; you could actually delete and erase and all that which you can't very well do with Braille. So, that was the reason I wanted to learn to use a computer in the first place. It's been a very useful tool for that.

1:00:00

Ferguson: Okay. Kind of going along with...you were talking about using technology, like, in the work force and people were losing their jobs because they didn't know how to use it. Have you seen a major change in the types of jobs that blind people are able to get over the years, I guess, just since you've entered the work force for example?

Keninger: It's interesting because at first the computers, once we got that under our hats, it really opened a lot of things up; but then it started closing a lot of things off, too, because of the proprietary programming that you find in most of the large companies that some of which isn't accessible. Certainly the access to information has been huge compared to what it used to be, and jobs that rely on that kind of thing and jobs that require use of writing tools

and that sort of thing are much more accessible, much more easily done I think these days than they used to be. I think...I don't know, it seems to me that there was a time when there were more blind factory workers and that sort of thing, and I think that part of the change there might have been unions and part of the change there might have been this whole safety concern issue; it kind of didn't go forward. I don't know that there are that many blind factory workers in Iowa these days, so that might be an area that maybe there are fewer of. I know they've said it's been hard to get people in because the unions, you have to be able to do all the jobs and they won't carve out a job that, you know, is accessible to a blind guy at least in some situations.

Ferguson: I'm just wondering how maybe your access to print materials has changed over the years, I guess, since you were in school. Did you...because, when you were in school, did they still have tapes, or was it records still then?

Keninger: When I was in, like, grade school, high school, it was mostly records. When I went to college, I got a tape recorder to...open reel, a big open reel tape recorder. It was my first experience with variable speed. It was exciting; let's speed these tapes up, yes! (Laughter) And, I got a lot of my initial materials for college on these tapes. They would be on a five inch open reel and they came from RFB and D mostly. There wasn't any scanning or anything like that. So, I had to do most of it by listening to it which was okay for some subjects, but it was very difficult for others. It was really hard for me to do Math that way. The only way I got through my college Algebra class was to practically write down the whole text book so I could understand what was

going on, at least in some areas of it. And, I didn't take another Math class; I was going to but then I just didn't because it was just too much work. (Laughter) But, I had an interesting experience recently. About 20 years ago I made some effort to do some research on, oh just a lot of different aspects of the 1850s. And, it was hard to get hold of the right materials and I didn't have the money to pay a reader to go to college libraries and do that kind of research, and so I kind of got stuck and I didn't ever finish what I was doing. And, I picked that up again recently and it was astonishing because all of a sudden here are all these things on the internet; these first-hand accounts on the kinds of things that you'd normally find back in the stacks of the library and they're right out there available, and that was just amazing to me.

So, my first time in college I didn't have anything but the tapes and a reader. I had a reader that I used pretty extensively. The second time when I was in college, I guess I had a reader still. It still wasn't really all that...we had tapes and readers was pretty much still what I had. And, then I went and worked on a Library degree. I didn't finish it, but I worked on it for several semesters and I don't think I...I think I had a reader budget, but I think I used a reader once because by then I could get everything I needed either by scanning it or by getting it off the internet, except for one assignment that we had to go to the library and look up World War II era stuff in this particular book. So, it's been a huge change.

Ferguson: Technology's amazing!

Keninger: Yeah, it is. I remember the first time I used Kurzweil reading machine. It was here in the Department, and it was in about '78. And, it was huge but I brought in, "All Creatures Great and Small," by James Herriot. (Laughter) And, laid it on the glass and it actually read it out loud to me and it was really exciting! (Laughter)

Ferguson: Oh, yeah!

Keninger: Just because I could do that. It wasn't because I needed to read that book; it was because I could make it work, so that was really exciting. I came down and learned how to use Opticon at that time, too, and use that for a few years. That was a thing that you could actually read print with, but you used a camera in one hand and you'd pull it across the text with your other hand, your left hand would be...under your left index finger would be this array of vibrating pins, and as the camera saw a letter the pins would vibrate in the shape of the letter.

Ferguson: Did you like that?

Keninger: No! (Laughter) It took a lot of getting used to because it was like real tickly. Sort of like holding a fly, you know. (Laughter) But, you did get used to it and I got so that I could read with it. And, I used it for the things that I was, you know, recipes and patterns and stuff at that time, and then I also used it when I started doing typing for people. I used it to check formatting and that kind of thing. I haven't used it in years. Don't have one anymore. They were very expensive, and then they're expensive to repair.

Ferguson: I guess I have just one more, big question...if you've been involved in any kind of advocacy over the years.

Keninger: Oh, the truth is out! (Laughter) No, I never was in a place where it was convenient, I guess, and I just was never interested in joining the consumer groups; and the experience that I had early on with the school, and all of that, kind of soured me on that for a long time. So, I never...I just never picked that up and went with it. I went to a couple of conventions, NFB conventions, national ones. The reason I went was very specific. The first time I went, I went to learn about technology because I knew they would have the information that I needed. So, I did go to the conventions for things that were that specific, but other than that I just did not participate. I was actually very busy during those years raising kids; I have six of them, and I had them in ten years, and so I was covered up with that task for a long time. (Laughter) And, that was my focus. It was very, you know, my kids and my family, and just making ends meet and keeping my life together. And, I just never really got involved. So, today I'm still not a member of either organization. I go to state conventions, and have for years of both, at least for the part of them, but I've not taken an active role in either organization.

Ferguson: Do you see that changing at any time?

Keninger: Not at this time. In fact, at this point it allows me to maintain a neutral position which for my current position has been helpful.

Ferguson: Sure, I can see that.

Keninger: In the future when I'm no longer, you know, involved in this job I may, but that's yet to be seen.

Ferguson: Okay. Well, I know I said I only had one more question but you mentioned child rearing and I was just wondering if, I guess if you had any interesting stories. Or if you found you were having to adapt to certain things while raising kids. I mean, not being able to see some things that were going on...if you had any amusing stories or just, I guess, any memories?

Keninger: Many! (Laughter) Blindness related, let's see I guess this is a blindness related story in a way although I think it could probably happen to about anybody. One day, hot, hot summer day, my oldest was about ten my youngest was about oh, not one yet, and my friend was there and she was sick, and she had three kids and they were there, too. So, we had all these kids in my house. It was very hot. It was very stressful for some reason that particular day and I had about had it. So, I decided that I would get myself a drink and I would just sit down where I could still tell what the kids were doing but, you know, kind of out of the way and have my, I think it was coffee. I drank coffee because my kids didn't drink coffee and it was one thing I could have to myself. (Laughter) So, I went and I got a cup of coffee and I took it with me and I was just going to sit down on the stair landing because that way I could...the kids were in the living room and I could watch them, but not be in there with them. So, I sit down on the landing with my cup of coffee all prepared to have just a little tiny time out. The dog had thrown up right where I sat! (Laughter)

Ferguson: You seem to have a lot of issues with dogs!

Keninger: Well, you know when you live with dogs all the time they occasionally do these things, yes. (Laughter) She'd gotten into something and whoowee! But, actually when my kids were little when I took them out in the yard I would put bells on their shoes so I could hear them, so I could tell where they were.

Ferguson: Okay.

Keninger: And, then we got the yard fenced, the back yard, and then I also I ended up putting a lock on the front door. And, then the little beggars took a broom and pushed the lock up; it was just a hook and eye lock. So, then we put a lock on it that had one of those little spring loaded things and you had to push the spring back before you could lift it up so they could not get out the front door. (Laughter)

Ferguson: You had ingenious children!

Keninger: Yes, yes. But, when they're real little you could tell what they were doing. It was pretty easy to tell...when they're your own and you know the environment, it's pretty easy to tell. As they get a little bigger they get a little cagier and then you have to take some other tactics, but overall I don't know. One of the things that was very important for me was that they always understand that I was the Mom and I was in charge. So I never said, "Read this mail," or "Take me here," or "Guide me there." I never did that even, though it meant I had to make other

arrangements because I didn't want them thinking they were in charge of me. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Yeah.

Keninger: So, that was very important to me. And, we went to ball games. I would take a book and they would say, "Mom, you can't read at the softball game!" "Yeah, what do you want me to do?" (Laughter) It's, like, really boring if I can't tell what's going on. I really don't like softball anyway and soccer, oh! But I would, like, walk them to their games and stuff when they were little, and then when they got older they would get rides and I didn't get to as many of their games when they got older because they'd get rides there and back, and that sort of thing. We all understood that it was probably for the best. (Laughter)

Ferguson: But, you didn't feel overall that being blind cut into anything or like...

Keninger: I think where it had some impact was really that the teachers of my kids sometimes impressed or imposed on them their own assumptions about what our life was like. I remember one of the teachers saying that my daughter didn't get enough visual stimulation. (Laughter) Like, give me a break! The kid is about as visual as anybody you ever met. You know, and it's not just because I can't see; it doesn't mean there isn't something to look at, you know! (Laughter) So, they had some opinions about these things and it was irritating. I remember a teacher who told my son that he would never pretty much amount to a hill of beans, which really made me mad and I don't know how much him

having a blind Mom had to do with that, but I suspect there were some overtones there. But, also my daughter, my oldest and my youngest I don't know if the middle kids did so much, but those two got in fights because somebody would make fun of their Mom.

Ferguson: Oh, and they'd defend?

Keninger: They would defend, yeah. So, there was some of that and that was hard; that was hard.

1:15:00

Ferguson: Did you go to the PTA meetings or any, like, were you involved with the schools at all?

Keninger: I did go to some PTA stuff. My biggest involvement was that I'm Catholic and we had CCD, which is like Sunday school on Wednesday, and I taught for 15 years. I taught...we lived in Ankeny at first and I taught third grade CCD class for, I suppose, ten years there, maybe not that long, no it was about five years. And, I volunteered to teach and they said, "Oh sure why not. Come on in." So, I taught and it was no big deal. And then, I moved to Newton and they wanted me, or no they didn't...I had a third grader. They didn't have a third grade teacher. I said, "I can teach third grade. I've done it for the last five years." And, they absolutely refused. And, a friend of mine kind of went to bat for me and said, "Look, you know, she can do this. You don't have anybody to do it. What are you going to lose?" (Laughter) So, they very grudgingly accepted my volunteerism as a third grade teacher, which I had already

done for five years so, you know, and anyway, I ended up teaching there for ten more years after that finally got all sorted out; but it was pretty annoying. But, it was kind of the way and that particular person, that's the Director or was at that time of that program, was always, "Oh, my goodness I can't believe you can do this!" And, she never got over that, you know, she just never got past it, which was annoying. (Laughter) So, that was my main contribution to the volunteer side of things actually.

Ferguson: Well, if you don't have anything else to add I'm through with all my questions, unless there's something else that you want to talk about.

Keninger: I don't think of anything right off hand. If I do, I guess we can renegotiate.

Ferguson: Yeah, not a problem.

Keninger: Okay.

Ferguson: Thank you very much for doing this.

Keninger: My pleasure.

1:17:24

(End of Recording)

Beverly Tietz

4-30-11